

They contested GP elections on 'reward' seats

Staff Reporter

BANGALORE: Third term of political initiation and most of them are still political novices. Almost all of them have contested elections on reserved seats, the nominations being seen as a reward for the 'good' party work that their male family members have done over the years. Their participation in the pre-election process was minimal.

These are some of the findings of the Gender Studies Unit (GSU) at the National Institute of Advanced Studies which conducted a field study on recently concluded gram panchayat (GP) elections in some of the panchayats in nine villages in the districts of Mysore, Udupi, Koppal and the all women panchayat in Mydolalu in Shimoga.

The findings were released at the 'Consultation seminar on gender and local governance' here on Wednesday amidst a mixed gathering of 30 newly-elected members, about half of them women, social scientists and private organisations. Minister for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj M.Y. Ghorpade was also present.

Though Karnataka has the longest history of reservation for women under Panchayati Raj, a microscopic look at the local dynamics of GP elections reveals, without inter-district variations, that party politics are very dominant.

Some of the disturbing observations are: Even in a non-political body, the calculations seem to favour political personalities; gram panchayats provide the space for formalisation of the informal system of patronage that has so far been in existence; though education is portrayed as the primary hurdle in women candidates being selected, field experience showed many cases where women had been selected because they belonged to families that could afford the expenditure of elections and that allowed mobility and provided escort.